

Exploring Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Urban Areas

By

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

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Brac University
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through complete and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all primary sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: Exploring Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Urban Areas

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1. Source of population

Parents of 3-5 years old children in Dhaka city

2. Does the study involve (yes, or no)

- a) Physical risk to the subjects (no)
- b) Social risk (no)
- c) Psychological risk to subjects (no)
- d) discomfort to subjects (no)
- e) Invasion of privacy (no)

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

- a) Nature and purpose of the study (yes)
- b) Procedures to be followed (yes)
- c) Physical risk(n/a)
- d) Sensitive questions (yes)
- e) Benefits to be derived (yes)
- f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study(yes)
- g) Confidential handling of data (yes)
- h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved

4. Will Signed verbal consent form be required (yes or no)

- a) from study participants (yes)
- b) from parents or guardian (n/a)
- c) Will precautions be taken to protect the anonymity of subjects? (yes)

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to Committee:

- a) Proposal (yes)
- b) Consent Form (yes)
- c) Questionnaire or interview schedule (yes)

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Abstract

A father is a person whose absence makes a child's life empty. Fathers are always beside their children in every well and woe. Several state-of-the-art studies reveal that fathers' involvement in child caring is correlated with children's holistic growth and development. Fathers' involvement in child care determines the quality and stability of the relationship between father and child (Norman et al., 2018). Since the COVID-19 pandemic influenced every human's life, especially children's, fathers' involvement is essential for supporting their development and well-being in such emergencies.

The purpose of the study is to explore fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban areas through qualitative research. Group discussions and in-depth interviews (IDIs) have been conducted to collect the data.

The findings section is divided into themes and sub-themes. First, the study discovered that most participants have the concept of child caring and fathers' involvement and impact of COVID-19. Second, the study's findings revealed that fathers have been doing different activities in supporting children's development. Third, all participants mentioned that fathers face various challenges regarding their involvement in child caring; they try to overcome the difficulties and get involved in child caring.

Based on the findings and discussions, this study suggests a few recommendations. Finally, the report is concluded with future research directions and the urge for more elaborative and exploratory research in the area.

Keywords: Father; Fatherhood; Fathers' Involvement; Child Caring; COVID-19; Pandemic

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely daughter, loving father, and respected father-in-law, who left us this year forever.

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List of Acronyms

IDI	In-Depth Interview
ECD	Early Childhood Development
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
IQ	Intelligence quotient
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization
SARS	Severe acute respiratory syndrome
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude and Practice
HSC	Higher Secondary School Certificate
IED	Institute of Educational Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MS	Masters of Science
USB	Universal Serial Bus

Chapter I

Introduction & Background

Introduction

"A father may only be a dad for a little while, but he is a child's hero forever"- (Amy Hoover). This quote of Amy Hoover says it all about the role of a father in a child's life. A father is one of the most influential people in a child's life and the role model of his children (Rosenberg, 2006). Although mothers are the primary caregivers of their children, fathers' contribution to their children's upbringing is essential, significant, and cannot be overlooked. The traditional view of the role of a father towards his family and children is limited to providing financial support and earning livelihood (Wilson & Prior, 2011). However, children of actively involved fathers have higher IQs, good cognitive skills, are emotionally stable, and have good relationships with peers (Rosenberg, 2006).

Most of the researches on parenting have overlooked the importance of fathers' involvement in children's life and only focused on the mother's contributions (Tekin, 2012). Nonetheless, the existing studies reveal the necessity of fathers in children's development and well-being. Despite the impact and importance of a fathers' involvement in a child's caring, and in every developmental stage of the child, the necessity of fathers in the development of children is yet to be appropriately established (Wilson & Prior, 2011).

The world is currently experiencing the pandemic due to COVID-19, which has a devastating impact on children and child caring practices. Because of this pandemic, more than 200 countries have imposed lockdowns or shut down for a certain period (Cowie & Myers, 2021). In addition, millions of employees and students had been

forced to stay at home to reduce the community spreading of the virus. Like adults, children also experienced the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, parents need to balance their responsibilities (e.g., household chores, child caring, and monitoring children's online learning classes). In addition, new additional duties, such as day-long child caring during the lockdown, can burden parents (Gelir & Duzen, 2021). Although mothers take the prime responsibility to take care of their children, fathers also share the responsibility of child care in this pandemic. Men have been contributing relatively high in child caring during the pandemic, which reveals by the real-time data collected in Italy and several countries such as the UK and Spain (Mangiavacchi et al., 2021; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Farré et al., 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020).

COVID-19 was first identified in Bangladesh on March 8, 2020 (Islam et al., 2020). From then till now, the pandemic affected the whole nation, and the rate of people being affected was increasing every day. Since Bangladesh is a developing country with many problems, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on the people of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the Government of Bangladesh imposed lockdowns several times for specific periods following the WHO guidelines, national health care experts' opinion and other countries. The schools and child-care centers were also closed because of nation-wide lockdowns. As a result, parents were more involved in child care and rearing.

This study is all about exploring fathers' involvement in child caring in COVID-19 in the urban areas of Bangladesh. As Bangladesh is a low-income developing country, fathers remain very busy earning a livelihood and supporting their families (Chakma, 2010). Fathers do not find it easy and face various challenges in getting involved in

children's development and child-rearing practices. Therefore, this study helps to know how fathers of urban areas are engaged in child caring, their practices, challenges, and children's developmental outcomes gained through fathers' engagement. It is an exploratory study, and data is collected following the qualitative research method.

Statement of the Problem

"A dad is the anchor upon which his children stand"-Amy Hoover. As per this great quote regarding fathers, a father is one of the most essential and precious people in a child's life. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, the roles of fathers and mothers are defined according to cultural norms (Chakma, 2010). In addition to that, the perception of fatherhood and fathers' contribution is quite different in our country compared to the other developed countries of the world (Sabur, 2019). However, the role of a father and his involvement in child care in Bangladesh is changing, as fathers are no longer strict to traditional norms.

Besides social norms, global crises and environmental factors also define parents' roles. As an example, a recent international incident has impacted and changed the ordinary course of life over the globe. From the beginning of 2020, all the living beings on the earth have been going through a terrible experience: the pandemic of COVID-19. The pandemic has influenced the lives of people worldwide. Parents, both fathers, and mothers and their various roles and responsibilities have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. According to a UNICEF (2020) report, parents and children have been facing immense difficulties with the outbreak of COVID-19.

Governments of various countries of the world-imposed lockdown or shutdown to mitigate the spread of the virus in spring 2020. Besides, schools and day-care

facilities were declared closed for an uncertain period around the world. UNESCO estimated that around 190 countries had shut schools, and approximately 1.6 billion students faced school disruption (Egan et al., 2021). To mitigate such loss, children need more care and support from their parents. In such circumstances, mothers' and fathers' involvement in child caring is essential for helping children reach their developmental milestones and to mitigate the loss of children that happened during this pandemic of COVID-19. Parents played a crucial role in supporting and motivating their children in the COVID-19 pandemic (Senin & Halim, 2021).

In Bangladesh, fathers of urban areas are always busy and do not have sufficient time because of the heavy workload and committing job hours (Ball & Wahedi, 2010).

However, fathers find it hard and face various problems in getting involved in child caring practices and child development. The pandemic makes it harder for fathers to be involved in child caring for managing livelihood. According to the World Bank, 68% of people become jobless due to the pandemic in Bangladesh (Habib, 2020).

Moreover, fathers are always worried about their income source and how they manage their families' daily needs during this crisis (WHO, 2020). Additionally, job loss is correlated with increased depression, anxiety, distress, and low self-esteem (Panchal et al., 2020). As a result, fathers with low income or who have no job suffer from mental illness and relevant complexities and consequently cannot be actively involved in child care.

The proposed study is aimed to be conducted in the urban areas of Bangladesh, i.e., Dhaka. Because it is the capital of Bangladesh, the busiest, most populous, and the expensive urban area full of challenges, fathers dwelling in the city are sometimes involved in multiple works and responsibilities. Thus, this study helps understand how fathers' involvement in child care escalates children's holistic development, their

understanding of child-rearing practices, their current or usual practices as a father, and the challenges they face in child-rearing practices in Dhaka city during this pandemic situation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore fathers' involvement in child caring during the pandemic of COVID-19. The pandemic has impacted every human life severely around the globe. Due to the pandemic, many changes have taken place in every human's daily life. Children are confined at home because of the closure of schools and child care centers. They cannot even go to the playground or terrace to play with their peers and participate in any form of outdoor games.

Consequently, children went through the negative aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected their growth, development, and mental well-being.

Generally, in Bangladesh, mothers are responsible for taking care of their children.

However, fathers' involvement in child caring has increased from recent pasts in

Bangladesh. The not-so-great number of previous studies have highlighted that

fathers' involvement in child caring greatly impacts children's development and well-

being. During the lockdown, fathers stay at home for a long and deal with their

professional responsibilities from home, which is not a common scenario. Therefore,

parents provide extra care and allocate more time to their children at this crucial time.

This study intends to explore how fathers are involved in children caring during the

COVID-19 pandemic and identify the activities for children's development and well-being.

Significance of the Study

In Bangladesh's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially in Goal 4, the policymakers and experts emphasize ensuring early childhood development and care for young children (UNESCO, 2021). The Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy 2013, especially section 7.3, draws attention to parenting and the involvement of parents in child caring. Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, parents are one of the core components of the micro-system (Pleck, 2007). Moreover, WHO published a guideline for improving early childhood development, and it has direct effect on parents and primary care provider of infants and young children (WHO, 2020). According to this guideline, fathers should be considered as a stakeholder in the early intervention of children's lives. Importantly, fathers' involvement in child caring or fathers' active participation in child development is a relatively new domain of research that started in 1970 (Lamb, 2000). Parents, especially father-child positive relationships, have a massive influence on children's growth and development. Nonetheless, fathers' involvement has not been correctly and adequately established yet. Therefore, it is essential to escalate fathers' child-care involvement to better future citizens.

The world is currently experiencing the pandemic due to COVID-19 and going through a terrible time. The current crisis has affected the world economically and caused health and social crises. The pandemic has a devastating impact on family life because of increased household activities, responsibilities, and child care (Del Boca et al., 2020). As per the report of UNICEF 2020, more than 80 countries have implemented lockdowns, affecting an estimated 1.4 billion children due to the closure of schools, child-care centers, and outdoor facilities. Another level of challenge has been created for parents in balancing the scheduled work and family as they had to

rearrange the care of their children (Alon et al., 2020). The COVID-19 crisis creates new challenges for child caring and parents globally, both in the short and long term (Gromada et al., 2020).

In Bangladesh, countable finger research has been done to date on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in ECD. Nevertheless, fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic is not directly mentioned in the previous studies. Whereas, it is well-known in the sector of ECD that positive attachment and active involvement of fathers help children develop their cognitive, physical, language, and socioemotional skills (Fogarty & Evans, 2009). Hence, by increasing fathers' involvement in children's caring during this crisis period of COVID-19, children can be supported better in achieving their optimal growth and development. Thus, it is high time to explore the impacts of a fathers' involvement in child caring during and after the pandemic.

Although fathers face various challenges such as cultural barriers, extreme workload, and mental pressure, many fathers are getting more involved in their child caring practices in recent times, even during the pandemic. An online survey in Canada reveals that 40% of participants acknowledged that COVID-19 lockdown has positive consequences on their fatherhood practices. Around 52% of fathers became more aware of the importance of their role, 60% observed that they could come closer to their children, and 48% of fathers decided to get more involved with their children in the future (Margaria, 2021). Thus, time and society demand to explore the importance of a fathers' involvement in child caring, child development, and well-being during and after crisis periods. Policies and practices need to be introduced in our country to escalate more involvement of fathers in child caring and well-being.

Above all, the existing literature shows that the research performed on fatherhood, fathers' involvement in child caring, and fathers' perception and understanding of child development is inadequate and limited. Moreover, as the COVID-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon, very few studies have been performed with the pandemic and effects of the pandemic in mind.

Therefore, the study is significant and essential because it introduces a new research dimension about fathers' involvement in child caring during emergency and crisis periods. It explores fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic and helps to determine how much fathers should be involved in child caring during any emergency or pandemic. Moreover, this study can help policymakers and program designers make policies in this regard and design effective programs on fathers' involvement in child caring to cope with any pandemic or emergencies.

Research Topic & Research Questions

Research Topic

The research is to exploring fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban areas. Fathers have direct or indirect influence on a child's life. However, fathers' involvement is related to children's positive outcomes (Rollè et al., 2019), the necessity of fathers' involvement in child caring needs to be highlighted more. The COVID-19 pandemic has an immense influence on children and people worldwide. Therefore, it is essential to know how fathers are involved in child caring during this crucial time.

Research Questions

1. What is the understanding of parents about the involvement of fathers in child caring?
2. How are fathers involved in different activities supporting children's development and ensuring children's well-being in this pandemic situation?
3. What are the challenges that fathers face in child-rearing practice?

Operational Definition

Father and Fatherhood

A father is one of the two prominent people who share the credit behind a child's birth. A father is a male who is referred to as a parent regardless of whether he is biologically connected or not (Phares et al., 2005). Moreover, Lamb (2000) defined a father as "*a breadwinner, a moral teacher or guide, and a sex role model.*" Therefore, fatherhood is the most precious part of men's lives and is quite essential for their identity (Pleck, 2007).

Dr. David Popeneo, the great sociologist, and the colonist in the field of father and fatherhood-related research framed a father as the most important person by his famous quote, "*Fathers are more than just a second adult in the home*" (Rosenberg, 2006).

Fathers' Involvement

If a family is considered a two-wheeled car, father and mother are the two wheels. If the wheels are not in their proper order or inactive, the car cannot move forward properly and reach its destination. Therefore, it signifies the importance of fathers'

involvement in children's life. According to a study, Marsiglio (2000) stated that fathers' involvement is the extended, positive, and active fathers' participation in their children's lives (Fogarty & Evans, 2009).

Fathers' involvement dramatically impacts children's development, mental health, and well-being (Ball & Moselle, 2007). Moreover, fathers' involvement helps children to develop social skills, good peer relationships, and high tolerance levels (Pharese et al., 2005).

Child Care and Caregiving

Today's children are the future citizens. If we wish to build up a bright future generation, we need to care for the current seedlings like children properly. In the first place, care or child care can be referred to as attending and remaining beside the children and responding to their needs for proper development. According to the Child Day Care Center Law and Legal Definition, child care means responding and stepping into the needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-going children outside of school hours by people other than their parents (Legal & Inc, 2021). Child Care can also be referred to as the caregivers' behaviors, attitudes, and practices (Jallow, 2006).

During the International Conference on Nutrition in 1992, a formal definition of "Care" was declared as the provision of time, attention, and support in the society (household and community) to meet the physical, intellectual, and social needs of the grownup kids and other members of the family (FAO/WHO, 1992). On the other hand, Longhurst defined care as providing resources (i.e., time, attention, love, and skills) in the household and community to meet the essential needs such as physical, cognitive, and social needs of nutritionally disadvantage people (Longhurst, 1995).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Prajapat & Sharma (2020) stated that COVID-19 is a transmitted disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first discovered in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Jee, 2020). Hence, it is the fifth documented pandemic after the flu pandemic in 1918. It is a health crisis for people around the world and the greatest challenge the world has faced since World War II (Fang & Meng, 2020). Every human being on the earth experienced the devastating impact of COVID-19. According to a report by WHO, over 234 million confirmed cases of infection and around 4.8 million cases of death had been documented to date (WHO, 2021).

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter mainly focuses on the previous studies which have been done on fathers' involvement in child caring. The chapter is divided into four parts: (i) fathers' involvement in child caring, (ii) the importance of fathers' involvement, (iii) fathers' involvement in child caring in the global context, and (iv) fathers' involvement in child caring in Bangladeshi context. To get an insight into each part, following systematic literature review has been performed.

Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring

A father is one of the most essential and precious people in a child's life. In recent studies, fathers have been found acting as the motivator, instructor, friend, playmate, and carer (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015). Fathers' involvement can be defined as continual interaction, ensuring reliability and accessibility, and providing resources to their children (Fogarty & Evans, 2009). According to a study conducted in Florida, the role of a father in child caring could be replaced by any male individual, such as a stepfather, custodial father, or grandfather (Phares et al., 2005). In addition, diverse fathering forms determine the rights, responsibilities, and types of fathers' involvement in child caring (Marsiglio et al., 2000).

The strong attachment and bonding between a father and his child are significant for a child's holistic development and well-being (Pleck, 2007). It is widely accepted and well established that children's early years are crucial for their proper development and future success. Moreover, fathers who spend quality time with their children help develop children's cognitive skills, language, socioemotional skills, and physical skills (Wilson & Prior, 2011).

On the other hand, men whose fathers were not involved with them are most likely to become less involved in their children's lives and believe in less responsibility, observe bluntly, and guide their children less intently. Moreover, they build fewer warm relationships with their children in comparison to men who had an involved father (Hofferth, 1999).

According to the Census Bureau 1991, one in five preschool-aged children of the USA were cared for by their fathers when mothers were occupied in working outside (O'connell, 1993). On the other hand, fathers in Oman spend time with their children as caregivers, playmates, and educators (Tekin, 2012). In Japan, men were more involved in child caring whose wives were service holders or had higher educational qualifications (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013).

Fathers can be the primary caregiver for their children, and fathers' involvement paved the pathway of children's developmental outcomes (Cath et al., 2013).

Furthermore, children with involved fathers appropriately do their daily activities; they show a higher level of social skills and good performance in school (Sonali & Mishra, 2013). The involvement of both parents helps to shape a child's academic path and mental and physical development (Senin & Halim, 2021).

In summary, the involvement of fathers in children's life cannot be described in a few words, and fathers' involvement cannot be overlooked not only for the welfare of children but also for fathers' satisfaction and well-being.

Importance of Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring

"One father is more than a hundred school-masters" - George Herbert, a great British poet. The quote about the father reflects the importance of fathers in a child's life, development, and upbringing. Undoubtedly, a father's involvement in child caring is

very important for children's proper growth and well-being. Moreover, Fathers play a very censorious role in children's development and well-being (Sonali & Mishra, 2013). Fathers' involvement with children has been correlated with positive early learning outcomes, improved language and cognitive development, and good peer relationships (McWayne et al., 2013; Roggman et al., 2004; Frosch et al., 2001). According to a study, children brought up in a family of single-parent where the father is absent face the risk of suboptimal developmental outcomes (Ball & Moselle, 2007).

Through fathers' involvement, children gain profound tolerance levels against stress, achieve master skills on problem-solving and adaptive skills (Allen & Daly, 2002). The direct and indirect involvement of fathers has a massive impact on children's early years of life (Phares et al., 2005). Moreover, fathers' involvement prevents children from the delinquent activity and restricts them from substance use (Allen & Daly, 2002). Fathers influence children's holistic development and well-being significantly through their direct and indirect interaction (Khan, 2017).

Children with a highly engaged father are more friendly, have good physical fitness and psychological stability (Allen & Daly, 2007). Additionally, fathers' involvement in child caring is beneficial for increasing children's cognitive skills (Flouri, 2010). Consequently, children of a highly involved father gain better problem-solving skills, more excellent intellectual development, increased curiosity, and good self-regulation skills (Pruett, 2000; Cowan et al., 2005).

Fathers who are involved in various domains of their child's development are happier as a parent and have healthier and more successful children (Fogarty & Evans, 2009). The fathers' involvement has affected children's social development, academic

success, language and intellectual development, and physical development (Lamb, 2004). Furthermore, children of involved fathers have enriched vocabulary, language proficiency, and good literacy skills (Allen & Daly, 2007). Moreover, fathers' active involvement in caring for preschoolers and school-aged children positively impacts children's problematic behaviors (Aldous and Mulligan, 2002).

Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring Global Context

Fathers' involvement in child caring varies from culture to culture and from one county to another. Since the mid of 1970, the research on fathers got focused, the transition of fathers' role was quite noticeable (Lamb, 2004). It has been well established that fathers play an important role in children's development and well-being (Ihmeideh, 2014). However, fathers worldwide sometimes cannot be involved in child caring due to various reasons and constraints.

The existing studies on fathers' involvement in child caring reveal the scenario of fathers' involvement in child caring. For example, in the UK and USA, highly educated fathers are more involved in child caring than fathers with lower educational qualifications (Sullivan et al., 2014). Moreover, 24% of fathers in the USA perform the role of the main caregiver of preschool-aged children (Flippin & Crais, 2011).

In Netherland, fathers are equally involved in child caring. Netherland fathers are more involved in physical and logistic child-care activities (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015).

As per a study conducted in Finland, fathers actively spend 4.5 hours with their children on weekdays. Moreover, 47% of fathers of the study expressed their grief for being less involved in child caring for various reasons (Halme et al., 2009). In Germany in 2019, fathers spent 2.8 hours per day in child caring. The trend of involvement in the child caring has increased 89% among fathers, and greater

involvement has been observed in preschoolers' fathers (Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021). Additionally, Australian fathers spent only 2.21 hours per day before the pandemic of COVID-19 (Craig & Churchill, 2020).

According to a survey, Japanese fathers spend 3.1 hours daily in child caring (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013). However, fathers are less involved in child caring in several low-income countries like Gambia, Colombia, and Zimbabwe. Surprisingly, only 11% of the fathers are emotionally and cognitively involved with their children, which is very low (Gromada et al., 2020).

Various programs regarding fathers' involvement have been running in Canada and the USA to increase fathers' involvement in child caring (Tekin, 2012). However, a study conducted in India (Lucknow) revealed that fathers' involvement in child caring is mainly dependent on and influenced by fathers' educational qualifications and occupations (Sonali & Misha, 2013).

Since the world is experiencing the pandemic due to COVID-19, a slight change has occurred in fathers' regular practice for child care. Therefore, it is interesting to know how fathers around the world are involved in child caring during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when everyone has had tough days, children had experienced the worst situation due to no outings, no outdoor games, no get-together with friends, and no learning facility. Although both fathers and mothers, parents performed a vital role in ensuring support and motivation toward their children in the pandemic (Senin & Halim, 2021). Moreover, fathers were intended to spend time with their children and help them study (Gelir & Duzen, 2021).

According to a study, an immense increase of fathers' involvement in child care and use of this variation, involving fathers instead of only relying on mothers, estimates its impact on children's well-being (Mangiavacchi et al., 2021). Jallow (2006) urges the need for identifying and documenting a fathers' contribution to child care. A study reveals that some fathers provisionally became the primary caregiver during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alon et al., 2020; Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020). Several countries, such as the USA, UK, and Turkey, emphasized parental involvement in preschool children learning activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gelir & Duzen, 2021).

Generally, gender plays an essential role and negatively influences child care. In support of this claim, there is a study, i.e., (Sevilla and Smith, 2020), conducted on child care in UK families with children of early ages that found a minimal gender gap in contributing to child care. Likewise, in Germany (2017), men spent less time in child care and household activities than women; and daily, on average, they merely give three hours on child care and household activities while women spent around five hours (Kreyenfeld and Zinn, 2021). Similarly, in Italy, fathers' involvement in children's upbringing is relatively shallow (Bloemen et al., 2010). During the lockdown period in Australia, mothers spent an additional four hours daily on child-care, and fathers increased only two hours in child caring (Cooper & Mosseri, 2020).

On the other hand, some positive and noteworthy events were also found throughout the world regarding child care and fathers' involvement in caring for their children. According to a study conducted in the USA, the percentage of sharing responsibilities in child caring among parents has increased from 45% to 56% (Carlson et al., 2020). Furthermore, children achieved positive behaviors like handwashing and hygiene during lockdown (Tarsuslu et al., 2021). Fathers having kids (3–5 years) increased

child caring duration from 3 h/day to 5.5 h/day in Italy during the pandemic (Zannella & De Rose, 2021).

In Germany, fathers' involvement has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as fathers spent 5.3 h/day on child-care in spring 2020 compared to 2.8 h/day in spring 2019 (Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021). Besides, highly involved fathers spent more time with children's works and activities in the pandemic; some fathers deducted working hours for family work such as household works and child care in the USA (Ryan-Pettes et al., 2020).

An online survey undertaken in Hungary between 6 and 14 April 2020 revealed greater involvement in child care during the pandemic of COVID-19 (Margaria, 2021). According to a study conducted in Turkey, 44% of parents stated that their bonding with their children became stronger during the lockdown, and 56.4% perceived that they get the opportunity to take better care of their children in this crisis period (Tarsuslu et al., 2021). Similarly, in Malaysia, both fathers and mothers give more support and encouragement to their children to complete various tasks or activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Senin & Halim, 2021). In India, during the lockdown, parents play an essential role in maintaining a diet plan, physical fitness, encouragement, storytelling, and other activities (Raj & Khare, 2020).

Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring Bangladeshi Context

Bangladesh is an overpopulated country with approximately 164 million people (Population, total - Bangladesh | Data, 2021). The society of Bangladesh is well-known for being dominated by men. Here, fathers are the decision-makers, planners, security providers, and financial supporters. In this country, a father can be defined as a man biologically related to the child's birth; and fatherhood is the man's

responsibility that continues till the end of his life (Chakma, 2010). Moreover, a primitive thought about fathers in Bangladesh is that a father is his family's primary earner and decision-maker. Also, fathers act as the creator of opportunities for their children to explore and develop different skills from the outer world (Ball and Wahedi, 2010).

Nevertheless, very few and preliminary studies have been conducted in the field of fatherhood and father involvement in child caring practices in our country. Therefore, it is a concern, and the area of research needs to be focused on highly. A study shows that parents have limited knowledge and practice on early childhood development in Bangladesh (Zhong et al., 2020).

In Bangladesh, fathers' involvement in child caring varies among families. For example, fathers are more involved in child care in nuclear families; and fathers in extended families have less involvement (Akter, 2019). Similar findings have been shown in a study that reveals fathers of nuclear families are more engaged in child caring than extended families' fathers (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013).

A study conducted on urban fathers about their perceptions and practice of fatherhood revealed that 90% of fathers assumed that mothers do the primary child care works in various ways, such as feeding and bathing. However, fathers play the role of economic supporter, protector, prime decision-maker, and do outdoor activities with their children (Chakma, 2010).

As per the findings of a study, 44% of fathers of urban areas are not aware of mental well-being. On the other hand, 14% of fathers knew how to provide collaborative care to stimulate the children, and 18% of fathers played and walked with their children as supportive activities of their children's mental well-being (Haider, 2013).

After the outbreak of COVID-19, millions of people were forced to stay at home due to the imposed lockdown declared by the Government of Bangladesh. To slow down the spread of the virus and lower the infection rate, all educational institutes around the country had been declared closed for an uncertain period. As a result, the children were confined in their own residence. School authorities conducted a very limited number of activities over the internet in some places. However, the internet is a luxury for many people to date, and they can hardly manage to join in those activities. Suddenly, parents had to manage their children at home for the day long and, at the same time, most of them had to start working from home. However, some parents delightedly expressed that their relationship with their children became stronger (Khatun, 2020).

According to a cross-sectional study, children suffered from various mental disorders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that 6.2% of children had moderate to severe depression, 6.9% had moderate to severe anxiety, and 4.9% had moderate to severe sleeping problems (Yeasmin et al., 2020). This report suggests that fathers' involvement in child caring is essential during this pandemic of COVID-19 since positive father-child relationships help children in their holistic growth, development, and well-being.

The study setting of this research work was in Dhaka city, one of the most densely populated cities globally, with 21 million residents (Dhaka Population Demographics, Maps, Graphs, 2021). Men in Dhaka city are involved in diverse workforces for earning their livelihood. Most of them remain extremely busy and cannot afford enough time to spend with their children. Urban fathers have less time to spend with their children due to heavy workloads (Ball & Wahedi, 2010). However, in recent times, fathers of urban areas have tried to spend time and get involved with their

children after office time (Khatun, 2020). In addition to that, fathers of urban areas spent an average of 3-4 hours a day (Akter, 2019). According to “Knowledge, Attitude and Practice” (KAP), 71% of parents of 3-5 years old children have limited knowledge on ECD; 96% of parents have a good attitude toward their 3-5 years old children, and 42.3% of parents do a lower level of child care practices (Begum, 2019).

Although fathers got the chance to be involved in child caring during this pandemic, they faced various challenges, such as cultural barriers, extreme workload, and mental pressure. Consequently, urban fathers cannot get involved more in child caring during the pandemic. Therefore, UNICEF published parenting tips for providing proper care in the pandemic. It was the only guide as there is insufficient literature in parental caregiving practice (UNICEF, 2020).

In sum, based on the above literature, fathers’ involvement in child caring is not established yet in our country. Therefore, it is the demand of time and society to explore the importance of a fathers’ involvement in child caring and well-being during the pandemic.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter highlights the method that is followed for conducting this study. In order to accomplish the research questions and fruitfully collect data, different tools have been used for this study. Overall, the research approach, study settings, participant selection procedure, data collection tools, data management, and data analysis are covered in this section.

Study Design

Qualitative research is a comprehensive term for research procedures that elaborate and explain persons' experiences, attitudes, interactions, and social settings (Fossey et al., 2002). Hence, this study followed a qualitative research approach. Furthermore, social reactions gain insights into the research questions through a qualitative research approach (Webber et al., 2021). Since the research goal was to explore the perception of fathers about their involvement in child caring, a qualitative research approach helps to gain deep insights into the phenomena. Therefore, non-experimental exploratory research helps explore fathers' understanding, challenges, and practices in child caring in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study Site

The study is intended to explore fathers' involvement in child care during the pandemic in urban areas. Consequently, the study was conducted in a metropolitan area of Bangladesh, Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh. Most of the participants were selected from the old part of Dhaka (Babubazar, Bangshal, Kazi Alauddin Road), and the remaining are from Hatilpool and Dhanmondi area.

Participants & Participants Selection Procedure

The study population consists of fathers and mothers who have at least one child aged between 3 to 5 years old and live in Dhaka. All the participants belong to middle-class families. Most of the participants are from nuclear families, and a few are from extended families. All the participants have educational qualifications minimum at the Higher Secondary School level.

A total of fourteen parents were selected to conduct this study where eight parents (five fathers and three mothers) for group discussion and six parents (four fathers and two mothers) for IDIs. In this study, the selected fathers are from different educational backgrounds with a minimum of higher secondary school certificate (HSC) levels and belong to middle-class families. Moreover, the selected mothers also have a minimum educational qualification of HSC level. To understand the questions asked during the interview, explaining one's perception, the ability to distinguish good and bad child-rearing practices requires a minimum level of knowledge and education. Therefore, the target population selection was very significant and crucial. The selection process of the participants has been the purposive sampling technique, where parents having at least one child of the age range 3-5 years old have been chosen for the study.

The following inclusion and exclusion characteristics are considered while choosing the sample.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Fathers and mothers of children aged between 3-5 years old.
- Fathers and mothers with minimum academic qualification of Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) level.

- Fathers and mothers belong to nuclear and extended families of urban areas.
- Fathers and mothers have been selected as per their voluntary participatory role.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Fathers and mothers from rural areas.
- Fathers and mothers who were not willing to participate.
- Fathers and mothers who disagree to continue at any time.

Data Collection Tools

To collect data for the study, following two different tools were used:

- Guidelines for thematic In-depth interview (IDI):
 - Semi-structured questionnaire
- Guidelines for group discussion

The in-depth interview (IDI) questionnaires and group discussion guidelines are developed based on the research questions. The guidelines are composed of simple terms for easy understanding of the participants. The questionnaire consisted of some dichotomous questions and some open-ended questions. Using the tools, the questionnaire, and the guidelines help to escalate the process of data triangulation and allow the researcher to gather the information in an insightful, explanatory, and constructive manner.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to conduct the study, the data was collected through two group discussions and six IDIs for the study. As the world is undergoing the pandemic period due to COVID-19, the participants were not agreed to give the interviews in person to ensure

health safety, social distancing, and mitigating the risk of community spread of the infection. Therefore, for IDIs, interviews have been conducted through direct phone calls and using different audio-video telecommunication applications, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Zoom, and Google Meet. In order to conduct the group discussions, Zoom and Google Meet (whichever is preferred by most of the participants) link was shared beforehand. The IDIs and group discussions have been recorded with the prior and proper consent of the participants.

Data Management & Analysis

Data analysis is a continuous process. Since data analysis is the bread and butter of every research, the data has been analyzed by following every analysis step.

Following data analysis procedure has been used for this study-

Firstly, the collected data has been organized accordingly for analysis, followed by content analysis. Hereafter, the participants' responses, obtained from the interviews and group discussions, have been transcribed before starting the analysis. Next, the hand notes and short notes that have been taken during the IDIs and group discussions have been written in a descriptive manner. Identification numbers were used for later referencing and identifying the documents conveniently. Backup files have been created in Google drive and stored in a USB disk to prevent any loss of the data at any time. Then, the processed data was read and memoized repeatedly to check for potential errors and inconsistencies. This step is followed by the organization and categorization of the data based on research topics and questions.

Consequently, the information was categorized into different themes and sub-themes.

Then, the themes were reorganized and assembled analytically according to the data

analysis steps. Finally, the findings of in-depth interviews and group discussions have been interpreted.

The interpretation was explanatory and reflective of the real story. Indeed, data interpretation was performed in a non-bias way. Consequently, various data analysis techniques, such as linking the story narratives with findings, analyzing individual transcripts, cross-checking among participants, and lastly, cross between study findings and existing literature, were used for data triangulation. Note, the Triangulation is a process to establish a broader understanding of a particular topic by using multiple methods or more than one data source (Patton, 1999), as appropriate. Thus, the data analysis for the study was done.

Ethical Issues

In order to conduct the research smoothly and ethically, the first thing was to get approval from the Brac Institute of Educational Development, Brac University (Brac IED, Brac University). Then, written consent from the participants was collected to conduct both in-depth interviews and group discussions. In this study, ethical principles were strongly followed in every step. Indeed, the highest priority is to preserve privacy and deidentification in conducting the IDIs and the group discussions.

The participant's personal information is kept confidential, and they were informed that the collected data would be used only for educational purposes. However, the participants were informed of an estimated time duration of the IDIs and group discussions before sending them the event's invitation and before starting the procedure. Moreover, permission was sought to record the interviews and group discussions. As well as, whenever any participant did not want to answer any question

of the IDI or did not want to continue or was unable to finish the group discussion, their decision was prioritized and respected. Moreover, the collected data has been interpreted without being biased and free from any inherent intention.

Validity & Reliability

It is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the tools used for conducting the study for the validity and reliability of the research. Therefore, pilot testing was performed, and expert suggestions were taken to validate the tools used in this study.

The face validity of the tools was examined with two experts' feedback from the Brac Institute of Educational Development (Brac IED), Brac University. The questions' suitability was tested through piloting the questions for the in-depth interview. The piloting was conducted with a father having the same criteria of sampling. After reviewing and piloting the tools, they were altered and then finalized for collecting data. Finally, the IDI questions revealed the demographic information of all the fathers and mothers.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations. First, the study site was limited to the urban areas only. Secondly, the number of participants is minimal due to time constraints, and it could not be generalized. Finally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the group discussions and in-depth interviews could not be conducted in person and on-site. It is also worth noting that the participants' nature was one of the limitations of this study.

Chapter IV

Findings & Discussions

This chapter contains the findings of the study and discussions on the findings. The findings and discussions are placed in two different sections. First, all the collected data from IDIs and group discussions are displayed according to the selected themes in the Findings sections. Then, on the other hand, assembling the data is discussed based on the relevant literature and research reflection in the Discussion section. Finally, this chapter is concluded with a conclusion and recommendations.

Findings

The findings of this study have been shown based on the collected data from the interviews and group discussions with the fathers and mothers of 3-5 years old children. A point worth mentioning is that the findings of this exploratory research are focused on the three research questions.

The section starts with the demographical details of the participants and moves forward to the themes and sub-themes, where the description of the findings covers all the research questions.

Demographic Details of the Parents

A total of 14 participants have participated in this study, where nine participants are fathers, and five are mothers. The demographical details of the participants were examined based on educational qualifications, the age range of parents and children, and their socio-emotional status. The age range of the participants is between 28 to 40 years. The age range of the children is between 3 to 5 years old, eight of them were female kids, and five were male kids. Most of the parents have only one child except

one father and one mother; they have two children. The educational qualifications of the fathers range from Higher Secondary School (HSC) level to Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), where the mothers had minimum educational qualifications of Higher Secondary School level to Master of Science.

Among the parents, four fathers are software engineers, four are teachers, and one is a businessman. Most mothers are housewives, and one mother is a service holder. All the participants belonged to middle-class families and were selected from the old part of Dhaka city. The rest are from Hatirpool and Dhanmondi areas. Most of the participants are from nuclear families, and a few are from extended families.

Theme1: Parents' Understanding about Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring

Perception about Child Caring

First, participants were asked to share their thoughts about child caring. Most participants replied that it is their duty for children's growth, development, and well-being. During the interviews, one of the participants stated, *"In child caring practice, along with the external care, it is imperative to respond to their words, giving them attention when they seek for attention, and giving them a proper space for play."* (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

Among the participants, one of the fathers answered differently. He claimed, *"When I hear child caring, day-care comes to my mind; and I think it is the care and supervision of a child or multiple children at a time, whose ages range match."* (In-Depth Interview # 3, Date: 26/10/2021)

In summing up the above findings, most parents thought child caring is a duty. Furthermore, it is essential to do it properly as it is correlated with children's development and well-being. Although, some have different views about child caring.

Understanding of Fatherhood

Most parents mentioned that fatherhood is a vital duty for a father. They thought that this duty starts with childbirth and continues for life long. Few of the participants responded with different answers. *"Fatherhood is a challenge. Due to fatherhood, the life of male changes in various ways."*- mentioned by one of the fathers during the group discussion. (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

One of the fathers mentioned, *"Fatherhood is a role, and the responsibilities towards the children who give us the opportunity to become a father."* (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)

All the mothers mentioned that there is a well-established term for fatherhood in our society which is only limited to giving financial support and decision making. All of them agreed that it is a crucial duty. However, one mother stated, *"The definition of fatherhood is different in the case of my husband, I guess. Because my husband always dedicatedly doing his duties as a father."* (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

Based on the above findings, it can be said that fatherhood is a duty and responsibility toward children. Most of the participants consider fatherhood as a vital duty.

However, some of the participants believed it was a challenge.

Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring

All the participants viewed that fathers' involvement in child caring is very important.

Most of them share similar opinions regarding fathers' involvement in child caring.

One of the participants mentioned, *“Children gain proper growth, and development, if there is equalized share of responsibilities between parents. Having multiple kids escalate the necessity of fathers' involvement in child caring; because it is quite hard for the mothers to manage them.”* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

One mother stated, *“To me, fathers' involvement means father must give time to their children whenever he gets time. So, if he is busy till night or busy for the whole week, he needs to be involved with his children once he becomes free.”* (Group Discussion # 2, Date: 6/11/2021)

With grief, most participants expressed that the fathers' involvement is not fully established to date because of the social and cultural norms. For example, one of the fathers mentioned, *“To me, fathers' involvement has not gotten proper importance in our society yet. People do not even think that father can also be a primary caregiver.”* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

The above findings revealed that fathers' involvement in child caring is essential.

Most of them acknowledge that fathers should give their hands with mothers in child care and rearing. However, some of the participants expressed that fathers' less involvement is subject to traditional and cultural norms of our society.

Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring for Fathers' Well-being

Most of the participants expressed that they enjoyed spending time with their children. Though, they do not realize how they benefit from their involvement in child

caring. As an example, one participant mentioned, *“Whenever I spend time with my daughter, I become happy and relaxed.”* (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)

Another participant stated, *“Through the involvement in child caring, I learned how to manage things patiently.”* (In-Depth Interview # 3, Date: 26/10/2021). One of the fathers explained, *“When my son tells rhymes, or alphabets in front of someone, I feel delighted.”* (In-Depth Interview # 1, Date: 24/10/2021)

All the participants expressed that they share a good relationship with their children. In addition, most of them revealed that children have an excellent attachment to them. For example, one of the participants mentioned, *“Because of the good relationship with my son, I forget all my pains.”* (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

The above findings conclude that children and fathers become beneficial through fathers’ involvement in child caring. Unfortunately, most of them do not directly realize the benefits of fathers’ involvement in child caring. However, they acknowledge their happiness in getting involved in child caring.

Fathers’ Involvement in Child Caring during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Most participants expressed that they had a good time during the COVID-19 lockdown. One of the fathers stated, *“The COVID-19 pandemic is a blessing for the parental hood.”* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Another participant mentioned, *“To me, the COVID-19 pandemic gave me the opportunity to get involved in my child’s caring. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I could not spend any time with my child.”* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

In contrast, few participants shared different opinions regarding their involvement in child caring during lockdown for the pandemic. One of the fathers stated, *“During*

lockdown. I always ensure his safety by keeping myself safe. Moreover, I ensure supplementary foods for him which were essential for his good health.” (In-Depth Interview # 1, Date: 24/10/2021)

The above findings revealed that although COVID-19 significantly impacts human life, parents thought it was a blessing for the parental hood. Most of the participants mentioned that they spent a lot of time with their children during the lockdown. It was the time when they got the opportunity of taking care of their children.

Fathers’ Involvement in Child Caring in Nuclear and Extended Families

Most of the participants agreed that there are differences in fathers’ involvement in child caring in nuclear and extended families. Most of them think that fathers who belong to nuclear families are more involved in child caring than the fathers of extended families. One of the participants expressed, *“In the extended families, fathers are more reluctant about their involvement in child caring.”* (Group Discussion # 2, Date: 6/11/2021)

One participant mentioned, *“To me, there are huge differences between the practice of child caring in a nuclear and joint family. Men are ashamed of doing household chores, and child caring in front of their family.”* (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

One participant mentioned, *“Children learn from nature in the extended families. They grow up with their younger, elder, and same-age cousins. Through playing, learning, and fighting, they grow up together, and their social skill enhances.”*

(Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021). Few participants disclosed that they could not differentiate between fathers’ involvement in child caring in nuclear and extended families.

Based on the above findings, it can be said that there are differences between fathers' involvement in child caring in nuclear and extended families. However, most of them revealed that fathers are more engaged in child caring in nuclear families than extended families.

Importance of Fathers' Involvement Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

All the participants acknowledged the importance of fathers' involvement in child caring. In addition, they expressed that fathers' involvement is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic as it is a crucial time for everyone. One of the participants stated, *"Fathers play a role in every child's life that others cannot fill. This role can have a large impact on a child and help him or her to shape the whole life."* (In-Depth Interview # 3, Date: 26/10/2021)

Other participants revealed, *"If fathers are involved in child caring, children feel more secure and safe. A child can learn different things and know about the outer world through fathers' involvement."* (In-Depth Interview # 1, Date: 24/10/2021)

Regarding the importance of fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic, all the participants agreed on the significance. One participant stated, *"During the lockdown, I realized the importance of my involvement in everyday caring. I gained the confidence and faith of taking care of my child."* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Few participants also mentioned some negative aspects of lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one participant mentioned, *"Children's screen time has been increasing in the time of lockdown."* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Based on the above findings, fathers' involvement is essential for emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic and in every situation and stage in children's lives.

Involvement for Achieving Developmental Milestones

All the participants agreed that fathers' involvement is essential for children's every developmental area. Most of them believe that fathers should involve in children's learning, playing and mental well-being. One of the fathers stated, "*The high level of fathers' involvement is correlated with higher levels of sociability, confidence and self-control in a child.*" (In-Depth Interview # 3, Date: 26/10/2021)

The above findings showed that most of the participants expressed their clear opinion about fatherhood and fathers' involvement in child caring before and during the COVID-19 pandemic; and shared their similar and different views about the importance of fathers' involvement.

Theme 2: Fathers' Involvement in Supporting Children's Development

Duration of Engagement Before and During the Pandemic

All the participants expressed that they spent more time with their children than the engagement before the COVID-19 lockdown. Fathers spent around 2 to 10 hours in COVID-19 lockdown with their children. One of the participants stated, "*Since the schools and coaching classes are off, I spend more than 8 hours with my son.*" (In-Depth Interview # 2, Date: 25/10/2021)

Regarding the regular activities done by fathers, most of them mentioned that they are involved in children's daily playing, learning, and sleeping. However, a few of them also mentioned other activities they have been doing regularly. For example, one of them expressed, "*My husband spends his time with his son at bedtime; and in*

holidays he takes him to the mosque for prayer.” (In-Depth Interview # 6, Date: 31 /10/2021)

Therefore, the findings revealed that fathers’ involvement increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, most of the fathers agreed they were more involved in child caring than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Practicing Various Cognitive Activities

Participants have been doing various types of cognitive activities with their children during the pandemic of COVID-19. Most of the participants said that cognitive skills are essential for brain development. Moreover, they mentioned that their children play with Blocks and Lego. For example, one of the participants mentioned, *“To me, Cognitive development is a combination of physical and brain development. My daughter plays with alphabet blocks and her kitchen set.”* (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Few of the participants shared other experienced in practicing cognitive activities. However, one of the participants stated, *“During the lockdown, my husband used to cut vegetables in different shapes in front of my children, and it enhanced my children’s cognitive skills, I believe.”* (Group Discussion # 2, Date: 6/11/2021)

Other participants mentioned, *“I did not do any activities for my son’s cognitive development. However, since he has an alphabet mat, puzzles help to develop his cognitive skills. Moreover, he loves to pretend play which also helps develop cognitive skills.”* (In-Depth Interview # 1, Date: 24/10/2021)

The above findings reflected that the fathers have been doing different types of cognitive activities to support their children’s cognitive skills. Most of the participants mentioned cognitive activities are essential for proper brain development.

Fewer Physical Activities

Most of the participants revealed that they had fewer opportunities to do physical activities during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the opportunities for physical activities are still not sufficient even though the situation has improved day by day. One of the participants mentioned, *“Children had minimal opportunity to practice physical activities during the lockdown of COVID-19.”*

(Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Few participants mentioned that they practiced some sort of indoor physical activities, such as throwing balls, drawing pictures, and running in the corridor. However, one of them mentioned, *“My husband took our children in the terrace for cycling, and it was the only physical activity in the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic.”* (In-Depth

Interview # 6, Date: 31/10/2021)

The above findings suggested that fathers need to do more physical activities for children’s proper physical development. However, during COVID-19, most fathers practiced fewer physical activities, and few did some indoor physical activities.

Ensuring Mental Health and Well-being

All the participants claimed that they tried their best to make their children happy to ensure children’s well-being. For example, one of the participants shared, *“For mental well-being, I took my daughter to the window, showed her the empty and less busy roads. Sometimes, I also asked her for some help in my work to give her some idea about the outer world.”* (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)

One of the mothers mentioned, *“My husband has been gardening with our daughter to make her happy. It gave immense pleasure to my daughter during the time of lockdown.”* (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

The above findings can be summarized as fathers' involvement in child caring is essential for children's mental health and well-being. Interestingly, most fathers mentioned that they always try to keep their children happy and delighted for their children's well-being.

Supporting Children's Language Development

Most of the parents shared similar thoughts regarding supporting language development. Most of them mentioned that reading books, reciting rhymes, singing songs, and storytelling were activities to support children's language development. For example, one of the participants from a group discussion mentioned, "*We always asked my son different questions. My better half recites rhymes for enhancing his language skills.*" (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Another participant stated, "*My daughter is very fluent in talking and talks a lot. Since my daughter was born, my husband has been singing songs in front of her. Then, they sang together during the lockdown, which helped develop her language proficiency.*" (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

Hence, the above findings suggest that fathers' involvement helps develop children's language skills. Furthermore, most of the participants revealed that they have been doing various activities supporting their children's language development.

Lack of Practice for Social Skills Development

Most of the participants mentioned that they did not do any activities during the lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the participants stated, "*We had not done any social activities during the lockdown. As my son is an introvert, we are very anxious about his development of social skills.*" (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Few of them mentioned that they kept the social activities minimal, which is essential for developing their children's social skills. Among them, one participant said, "*For social development of my daughter, I talk more with her than the usual time; and inspire her to talk with my students while conducting online classes.*" (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)

The above findings revealed that most of the participants agreed that the practice of increasing children's social skills was not sufficient. Besides, few participants mentioned that they did not practice any activities to support children's social development.

Theme 3: Challenges Faced by Fathers in Child Care and Rearing Practice

Factors Behind the Lack of Involvement in Child Caring

All the participants expressed that they faced various challenges, which decreased their involvement in child care and rearing practices. Most of the participants mentioned that economic stability, professional pressure, family environment, and cultural norms are the factors behind the less involvement of fathers in child caring practice before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one participant stated, "*The threat of losing jobs, job losing incidents, reduction of earning, mental instability and family crisis are the challenges faced by fathers.*" (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)

Few participants mentioned that children's expectations for fathers' longtime engagement and children's safety added new challenges and difficulties for parents. For example, a participant mentioned, "*Since children spent a huge time with parents*

during the COVID-19 pandemic, it increased their expectations and created a new challenge for fathers.” (Group Discussion # 1, Date: 23/10/2021)

Traditional views and cultural norms influenced fathers’ involvement in child caring. Most of the participants mentioned that traditional and cultural norms are the barriers that restrict them from involvement in child caring. As an instance, one of the participants expressed, *“Due to traditional view and cultural norms, most of the time fathers think child caring is not their duty. For this reason, fathers’ involvement in child caring is relatively low in our country.” (In-Depth Interview # 3, Date: 26/10/2021)*

In contrast, few of the participants shared different opinions. One participant mentioned, *“Sometimes, fathers face social obstacles while getting involved with their children. However, fortunately, I believe the involving tendency is inherited. As my father was quite involved with us in our childhood, I like to get involved with my children.” (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)*

Therefore, it is insightful from the above findings that fathers faced several difficulties involving child caring before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants provided divisive opinions about the reasons behind less involvement of fathers, including traditional views and cultural norms. In addition, few shared children’s expectations during the pandemic could be a new challenge for them.

Fathers’ Mindset Regarding Their Involvement in Child Caring

Most mothers believed that fathers’ view or mindset might be a reason for fathers’ less involvement in child caring and rearing practices. For example, a mother participant stated, *“It is fathers’ attitude that decides whether they will be involved in*

children's caring and rearing practice, no matter how busy they are." (Group Discussion # 2, Date: 6/11/2021)

Other participants mentioned, *"Fathers need to realize that their involvement is essential for children's development and well-being. It will be possible if fathers change their mindset."* (In-Depth Interview # 5, Date: 30/10/2021)

By summarizing the above findings, it can be said that fathers' mindset is an important factor in child caring involvement. Most of the participants mentioned that it might be a reason for fathers' less involvement in child caring.

Fathers' Mental Instability Leads to Less Involvement During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a very critical time that everyone is passing through. Most fathers agreed that they had gone through extreme mental stress and depression during the pandemic.

During the study, one of the participants expressed, *"Due to financial problem, I was psychologically exhausted. Sometimes, I was not mentally stable enough to spend time with my daughter."* (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021) While another participant mentioned, *"My husband became very depressed due to job loss during the lockdown. For this reason, sometimes he used to sit in a corner and did not want to talk with anyone, not even with our son."* (Group Discussion # 2, Date: 6/11/2021)

Therefore, the above findings show that mental stability is vital for fathers' involvement in child caring and rearing. Furthermore, most participants acknowledged that sometimes they could not be involved in child caring because of their mental instabilities. Consequently, mental instability restricts fathers from engaging in child caring and rearing practices.

Measures for Overcoming the Challenges and Increasing Fathers' Involvement

Most of the participants shared their opinion about how fathers' involvement in child caring can be increased. For instance, one of the participants mentioned, *"If fathers allocate a fixed time, to be called 'Us time', where no phone calls, no pressure, or tension takes place; it can help increase fathers' involvement in child caring."* (In-Depth Interview # 4, Date: 28/10/2021)

A few participants mentioned patience is the best medicine, and different programs that promote fathers' involvement can be a solution for overcoming difficulties in engaging in child caring. One participant stated, *"Patience can solve the issue, and helps in involving in child caring."* (In-Depth Interview # 3, Date: 26/10/2021)

Another participant mentioned, *"if seminars or programs are organized to promote the importance of fathers' involvement in child caring, it will be more helpful for grabbing fathers' attention, I believe."* (Group Discussion # 2, Date: 6/11/2021)

Besides, a few of the participants expressed that they will be more involved in child caring if they get opportunities. For example, one participant mentioned, *"I am hopeful that situation will soon come under my control and my problems will be solved. Then I will be involved more with my son's daily activities."* (In-Depth Interview # 1, Date: 24/10/2021)

Henceforth, it can be summarized from the above findings that fathers faced various challenges in getting involved in child caring. Most of the participants shared that allocated time may increase their involvement, whereas a few participants mentioned that different programs on fathers' involvement might be helpful.

Overall, the findings of the study revealed that parents have proper knowledge of child caring, different views about fatherhood and fathers' involvement. Moreover,

the group discussions and the interviews revealed that fathers' involvement in child caring helps reduce the stress and tiredness of fathers. Consequently, fathers' involvement in child caring is beneficial to both children and fathers. It is also worth noting that fathers were more involved in child caring during the lockdown due to the pandemic of the COVID-19. Indeed, fathers of nuclear families are more engaged in child caring than fathers of extended families.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that fathers have been practicing various activities for children's holistic (physical, cognitive, language, and socio-emotional) development. On the contrary, as per the findings, fathers face different types of difficulties, such as financial crisis, shortage of time, and mental instability in child care. Finally, programs and seminars on fathers' involvement would be helpful to escalate fathers' involvement in child caring.

Discussion

This section represents the interpretation of the findings found during the study and analyzes the research evidence with reference to the existing literature. It consists of three segments, namely understanding, practices, and challenges related to fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parents' Understanding about Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring

The study's findings revealed that parents have different perceptions and thoughts on child caring. The data collected through group discussions and in-depth interviews and the findings extracted from the collected data show that most of the parents perceive that child caring is a duty towards children for their upbringing and development. They mentioned that giving attention and responding to children are also a part of child caring. Similar findings have been found in a study on fathers' involvement in Florida, as Fogarty and Evans (2009) stated that children need to have their parent's attention and love; positive attention helps them gain more success and healthy life.

From the findings of the in-depth interviews regarding the parental understanding of fatherhood, most fathers agreed that it is an essential duty and responsibility for a man that begins from the birth of their child. Similarly, it was observed in a study (Sabur, 2019) stating that fatherhood is an identity for men all around the globe. Although, a few of the participants in group discussions defined fatherhood as a challenge. In a study conducted in Australia, a similar fact was figured out that is fatherhood is a challenge for new fathers, and it is a time for changes of many things (St John et al., 2005).

The collected data from group discussions and IDIs highlighted that fathers' involvement in child caring is essential for children's holistic development. Most of them acknowledge that fathers should give hands to mothers in child caring and rearing practices. Analogous research evidence is reflected in a study which states that men with more gender equality mindsets are relatively more involved in child caring and rearing practice (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015). On the other hand, few participants have an impression of the fathers less engaged in child caring and rearing due to social and cultural norms. On the contrary, research evidence revealed that despite the traditional view of fathers as breadwinners, fathers fulfill their duties of earning livelihood first and then engage with children in many areas (Lamb, 2004).

Fathers' positive attachment helps children to gain developmental outcomes, found in a study (Pleck, 2007). Similar findings have been found from the interviews where fathers revealed that children share a secure attachment with their fathers.

As per the data and the findings of the study, most of the fathers expressed that they feel happy whenever they spend time with their children. Similar results have been found in a study that reveals that fathers' involvement in children's primary care is a source of happiness and well-being for fathers (Norman et al., 2018). Furthermore, another study reflects that father who are highly involved in child caring get the opportunity to show their love toward their children (Allen & Daly, 2007).

Although COVID-19 has a devastating impact on human life, the study findings revealed that parents considered it as a blessing for parenthood. Most of the participants mentioned that they spent a lot of time with their children. Similar evidence was found in a research study that unfolded fathers' increasing involvement in child caring during COVID-19 (Möhring et al., 2020).

In extended families, children are more confident, emotionally, and physically more robust than nuclear families, as found in a study conducted in Sudan (Awad & Barke, 1992). In contrast, fathers of separated or non-traditional families are found more involved in child caring (Halme et al., 2009). Furthermore, collected data from the group discussion of this study highlighted the fact that fathers of nuclear families are more involved in child caring and rearing practices. Most participants agreed that fathers' engagement in child caring is relatively high to extended family.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fathers play an essential role in children's development and well-being as they spend more time with their children. This fact is evident from the data and findings of the group discussions and the in-depth interviews. It is also apparent in a research study that fathers spent more time in the COVID-19 pandemic and were involved in child caring during the time (Carlson et al., 2020). Additionally, fathers' involvement in child caring is essential for children's every stage of development. Most participants acknowledged the necessity of fathers' involvement in achieving children's developmental milestones. Similar evidence is shown in a study that mentioned fathers' direct and indirect impact on children's development (Lamb, 2004).

Fathers' Involvement in Supporting Children's Development

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fathers' involvement increased, as extracted from the data and the findings obtained from group discussions and in-depth interviews. For example, most fathers mentioned that they were more involved in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic as they stayed at home for a long time. Similar findings have been found in a recent study which revealed that since fathers spent more time with their children during lockdown for the pandemic, they were involved more in child caring (Carlson et al., 2020). Moreover, the findings of the study also

disclosed that most fathers participated in daily activities such as having lunch or dinner together, playing games on a mobile phone or with toys, and helping children to sleep at night.

Findings from the collected data demonstrated that most fathers have been doing different cognitive activities such as playing with Blocks or Lego or crafting to support children's cognitive skills. In addition, they mentioned that fathers' involvement helps develop children's cognitive and literacy skills. Similar findings have also been found in another study: children whose fathers were satisfied with their children's contribution gained higher cognitive skills (Rollè et al., 2019).

“In Bangladesh, fathers are less involved in children's physical care alike Turkish fathers.”- mentioned in a recent study (Akter, 2019). Symmetrically, a noteworthy finding from the interviews is that fathers acknowledged failing to spend enough time in physical activities with their children during the pandemic. Furthermore, the group discussions revealed a similar finding: most fathers mentioned that children had fewer opportunities to practice physical activities during lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They also added that the opportunities for physical activities for children are still not sufficient, although the Covid situation is ameliorating.

Children's mental well-being is necessary for proper growth and development. Collected data from the group discussions and interviews highlighted that all the participants tried to support their children's mental well-being by keeping them happy. Similar evidence has been found in a study highlighting that fathers' involvement influenced children's mental health and well-being (Khan, 2017).

According to the findings of interviews and group discussions, most participants expressed that they recite rhymes and tell stories during bedtime for language

development. Besides, a few of them talked much with their children and answered their questions to develop language competency. Similar evidence has been shown in a recent study that reveals that parents tell stories and recite rhymes to support children's language development (Khatun, 2020). Another study revealed that fathers' reading books with children help develop language skills (Rollè et al., 2019).

From the group discussion, it is extracted that most of the fathers did not practice activities to support children's social development during the lockdown. In contrast, few participants did fewer activities for children's social development. Similar views are found in the interviews where participants mentioned that supporting children's social activities was insufficient.

Challenges Faced by Fathers in Child Care and Rearing Practices

Findings obtained through analyzing the collected data from the group discussions and interviews disclose that fathers faced various difficulties involving child care before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as job loss, economic burden, less time with peace of mind and social norms. However, most of them mentioned several reasons for their less involvement. Nevertheless, few participants shared that the increasing expectations of children during the pandemic could be a new challenge for fathers. Similar findings have been found in a study that revealed the challenges faced by fathers (Mitchell et al., 2007).

The interviews' data and findings highlighted the fact that fathers sometimes could not be involved in child caring because of traditional views and cultural norms. Since it is well established in our society that mothers are the primary caregivers, caretaking is only associated with mothers. Similar findings were found from the group discussions with both fathers and mothers.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, fathers have suffered from mental disorders such as stress and depression. The findings of the group discussions and in-depth interviews reveal that most of the participants disclosed that due to lack of money, job loss, and workloads, fathers were suffering from stress and depression, which caused a lack of involvement in child caring. Similar evidence has been found in a study showing that 27% of parents suffered from the worst mental health in March 2020 (Patrick et al., 2020).

Collected data and obtained findings from the group discussions indicated that fathers' mindset or view might be a reason for fathers' less involvement in child caring. Similar views were also revealed from the interviews where few participants mentioned fathers' mindset needs to be changed regarding their involvement in child caring.

A recent study recommended that programs on fatherhood and expanding fatherhood programs need to be implemented (Akter, 2019). Similar findings have been found from this study's group discussions and interviews.

In sum, the above discussions illustrated fathers' involvement in child caring before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, their practices for children's holistic growth and development, comparison of fathers' involvement in nuclear and extended families, and the challenges faced by fathers. Most significantly, participants give some opinions about escalating fathers' involvement in child caring and rearing practices.

Conclusion

The importance of fathers' involvement in child caring and early childhood development cannot be overlooked to ensure the well-being and better future of children. However, people are not aware of the importance of child caring and fathers' involvement in child care. Unfortunately, there is not enough research to address the importance of fathers' involvement and perception. Moreover, fathers face various social and economic barriers in Bangladesh that keep them away from being adequately involved in their child caring activities. The COVID-19 pandemic adds a new dimension to the obstacles. Hence, it is a matter of concern to explore how fathers are engaged in child caring during this crucial period. Therefore, this extensive study was intended to extract the insights and necessities of fathers' involvement in child care for children's holistic development and well-being.

Moreover, the study analyzes the parameters and factors that play a significant role in fathers' involvement in child-rearing practices in normal time, during emergencies, and post-crisis time. In summary, this study is time-critical, effective, fruitful, and necessary for early childhood development (ECD), and it has a significant impact on the arena of ECD. Finally, further research needs to be done on fathers' involvement in child caring.

Recommendations

This study expects to explore the current status of fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic. It concludes with recommendations based on the overall findings to encourage fathers to be more involved in child caring. Following are the recommendations:

- ❑ Large-scale studies should be performed with larger samples and in populated areas (urban and rural settings). More studies need to be accomplished focusing on fathers and fathers' involvement in our country. Government and NGOs should come forward to allocate funding for research on fathers' involvement.
- ❑ Policies should be formulated on fatherhood and fathers' involvement in child caring that could help fathers realize the importance of their involvement in child caring.
- ❑ Programs need to be organized on fathers' involvement in child caring and rearing practices across the country; fathers must be included in parenting programs along with mothers.
- ❑ Ensure advocacy for incorporation of fathers' involvement in child caring and rearing practices. Ensure advocacy at the family level, community level, and national level.
- ❑ Public awareness about the importance of fathers' involvement in child caring and rearing practice should be created using different media, such as social, print, and electronic media.

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Annex 1: In-Depth Interview (IDI) Questionnaire

Research Title: Exploring Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Urban Areas

Date/time started: _____

Date/time completed: _____

Section A: Demographic Information

Father/Mother Name:	Age:
Sex (Male/ Female):	
Child's name:	Age:
Sex (Male/ Female):	
Occupation:	Educational level:
Location:	Phone No.
Monthly income:	
Type of family: a) Nuclear family, b) Extended family	
Number of children:	
Number of children goes to preschool:	

Section B: Parents' Understanding about Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring

Note: (Whenever the researcher uses this questionnaire with the mothers; researcher asked the questions to the mothers focusing on fathers)

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word "Child Caring"?
2. According to you, what is "fatherhood"? Could you please explain it?
3. As mothers are the primary caregiver of children, what is your understanding about fathers' involvement in child caring?
4. Since this is the Covid -19 pandemic, how do you get involved as a parent in child caring during this time?
5. In this COVID-19 pandemic, what is your opinion about fathers' involvement in child caring during this pandemic?
6. According to you, what is the necessity of fathers' involvement in child caring?
7. Since it is the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, what is your opinion regarding the importance of fathers' involvement in child caring during this time?
8. Is there any difference in fathers' involvement in child caring of nuclear and extended family?
 - a. Yes / No
 - b. If "yes", could you please explain?
 - c. If "no", why not?
9. In your opinion, do you observe any benefits of fathers' life through their involvement in child caring?
10. What is your opinion about the relationship between you and your child?
11. According to you, for achieving children's developmental milestones, how and what are the areas where fathers' engagement is essential?

Section C: Fathers' involvement in Supporting Children's Development

12. What are the daily activities you have been doing with your children?
13. Could you tell me how much time you spent in child caring daily?
14. As this is the time of the pandemic, how much time do you spend in child caring during the pandemic of COVID-19?
15. What activities have you been doing to develop your children's cognitive development during this pandemic? Example (Block/ Lego/Puzzle) etc.

16. According to you, what activities have you been doing to support your children's physical development?
17. Have you done any activities for supporting your children's mental health and well-being during a lockdown or shut down?
18. What activities have you been doing to support your children's language development during the COVID-19 pandemic? Example: Reading books/ reciting rhymes/ singing songs and twinkling.
19. Since it is time for the pandemic and children's are confined at home, what activities have you been doing to develop children's social skills?

Section D: Challenges Faced by Fathers in Child Care and Rearing Practices

20. According to you, what are the challenges fathers have been facing in child care and rearing practice?
21. Do you face the difficulties of involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic?
22. Since children 3-5 years old are very young, do you face any difficulties grasping their attention when doing any task or activity?
23. According to you, how can fathers overcome or cope with the challenges in child caring practice?
24. Do you think the traditional view and cultural norms affected fathers' involvement in child caring?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. If your answer is "yes", could you please elaborate?
 - c. If "no", then why not?

Annex 2: Guidelines for Group Discussion

Research Title: Exploring Fathers' Involvement in Child Caring during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Urban Areas

Preliminary questions:

- a) How are you all?
- b) How is everyone at your home?

Questions:

- 1) What is your perception of "fatherhood"?
- 2) What is your understanding of the involvement of fathers in child caring?
- 3) What is your understanding of fathers' involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 4) What is your perception about the importance of fathers' involvement in child caring?
- 5) Do you think the fathers' involvement in child caring varies in nuclear and extended families?
- 6) Do you think you are actively involved in child caring during the pandemic of COVID-19?
- 7) How did you manage time to spend with your child and child caring practices during the lockdown as you were working from home?
- 8) What activities have you been doing in supporting your child's physical development?
- 9) What types of activities have you been doing for your child's cognitive development during the pandemic?
- 10) What activities have you been doing for your children's socio-emotional development?
- 11) Have you practiced any activity supporting your children's language development during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 12) What challenges have you faced in child caring practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 13) Do you feel that the challenges can be overcome?
- 14) What is your suggestion about increasing fathers' involvement in child care in urban areas?

Annex 3: Consent Form for the Parents

Research Title: Exploring Fathers’ Involvement in Child Caring during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Urban Areas

I am Lioza Noor, an MS (Masters of Science) student in the Brac Institute of Educational Development, Brac University. As a part of my academic requirement, I am conducting this study to explore fathers’ involvement in child caring during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban areas.

As a parent of 3-5 years old children, you are be invited for an interview to share your views, experiences, knowledge, and practices about fathers’ involvement in child development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you agree to participate, you are expected to share your views, knowledge, and experiences about fathers’ involvement in child caring during the pandemic of COVID-19.

All your personal information shared by you will remain strictly confidential. The collected data will be used only for study purposes. I would be delighted to answer any questions regarding this topic and other queries.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you are the sole authority to decide whether you are willing to participate in this study or not. If you agree to participate in my research, please sign in the space below.

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Signature of the investigator

Date:

Signature of the participant

Date: